

War affects Iraqis' health more after fleeing

November 3 2008

The risk of depression is greater among Iraqi soldiers who took part in the Gulf War than among civilians. Surprisingly, on the other hand, neither of these groups showed any signs of post-traumatic stress ten years after that war-with the exception of those Iraqis who have left Iraq. This is demonstrated in a study published in the new issue of the scientific journal *New Iraqi Journal of Medicine*.

The study was conducted collaboratively by researchers at Uppsala University, Wayne State University, and the University of Baghdad. It compares the health of Iraqi soldiers that participated in the first Gulf War with Iraqi civilians ten years after that war.

It is the first major study where it was possible to control for a series of factors that have affected earlier research that primarily has focused on the health of American and British soldiers that took part in the war compared with that of soldiers who remained at home (e.g. inexperience of the culture, geography, bacteria, viruses, and exposure to a number of vaccines, which are only relevant in the case of soldiers who went to war).

"We found that the risk of depression was greater among Iraqi soldiers compared with Iraqi civilians. The findings also show that those soldiers who had been inside Kuwait ran a greater risk of depression than soldiers who were far away from the centers of the war," says Bengt Arnetz.

The war itself thus increases the risk of mental health problems, which is known, but it has never been demonstrated in the case of Iraqi soldiers.

On the other hand, what is new is that neither soldiers nor civilians showed any symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, PTSD. Other studies, on the contrary, have shown that this is common when they returned home.

"When we study Iraqi citizens who have fled to the US, on the other hand, PTSD is common. This indicates that it does not break out during the time the individual is experiencing the stressful situation, which Iraqis have been doing ever since the Gulf War if they are still living in Iraq," says Bengt Arnetz.

"Alternatively, it can be other factors following the return home or the flight from Iraq that lead to American soldiers and Iraqi immigrants in the US evincing an increased risk of developing PTSD after the fact, even though they were healthy directly after returning home."

Source: Uppsala University

Citation: War affects Iraqis' health more after fleeing (2008, November 3) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-11-war-affects-iraqis-health.html>

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